

LIFE AS MARKET WOMEN: EXTRINSICLY OR INTRINSICLY MOTIVATED?

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ABSTRACT

Wet-markets in Sarawak have remained a momentous part and parcel of the Sarawak people. Such markets exist in both the rural and urban areas of the state, but more importantly, it is popularized by women, either as sellers (traders) or buyers in these markets. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to critically examine the factors that motivate female sellers (market women) in these wet markets to take up this occupation. To empirically explain these factors, the study will explore the notion of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in relation to women's participation in the wet market trading activities. Intrinsic motivation is defined as the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some external influence. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is a behaviour that takes place when one is being influenced to do something by an external force.

Keywords: Sarawak, Market, Wet Market, women, Extrinsic and Intrinsic motivation

INTRODUCTION

This paper critically examines factors motivating women traders or market in the wet markets in Sarawak to engage in this form of livelihood. The motivating factors will be explored based on the notion of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. Indeed, women have always played vital roles in both the reproductive and productive growth of Malaysia and other countries as well. These roles have incessantly changed over time. For example, prior to the middle of the last century, women in Malaysia (Sarawak in particular) had been involved in petty trading and helping out in family agricultural activities and businesses (Mike 2013). Mike noted, in the 1950s, women began to join the workforce as schoolteachers, nurses, and secretaries. The writer pointed out that currently, women can be found in nearly all professions and at all levels of the corporate and even in the political scene, and 47% of the total workforce of the country are women. Nevertheless, compared to men, women generally are more prevalent in the so-called low-income occupations. These include jobs like cleaners, car-parking ticket officer, etc. Others have ventured into informal businesses in either service or retail sector. This article, however, will centre on the latter as the target group is the market women.

Since her independence in the 1957, the Malaysian states have seriously pursued developed status through socioeconomic advancement, thereby, transforming her agrarian society and industries into industrial and technological society. However, many traditional ways of life and production have continued to exist, and even 'booming'. A typical example is the wet-market (Pasar basah) in almost all cities and villages. Unlike the general perception, the wet-markets of Malaysia do not merely sell fresh vegetable, fish, meat and other agricultural produce, many stalls sell durable goods which include clothes, toys and cheap electronics. Although, the wet-market is wide spread in Malaysian cities and villages, of great importance to this article is those situated in Sarawak—the study area. The details on the study area will be discussed in a later section.

As mentioned above, wet-markets are populated by women traders, and in many instance female customers. This is not surprising given that most women in Sarawak are very enterprising, and works very hard to ensure their family's survival and sustainability. The age range of the women sellers or traders in the wet-market varies from mid-twenties to sixties and above. And about 85% of them are married with children. The remaining 15% is single mothers or daughters assisting their mothers that are sometimes absent due to family emergencies or other communal commitments. On average, most of these women have attained at least primarily (elementary) or secondary school educational level. Thus, outsidess the local dialects or the national language (Bahasa Malayu), they could speak some level of English and have absolutely no problem calculating their earnings.

The goods and produce these women sell ranges from many localized farm produce, poultry and fresh and sea fish to clothing and other essentials. Indeed, the volume of goods and services offered in these markets is sometimes seasonal, but at any given operational time, the markets have a lot in terms of goods and services to offer to their customers and tourist. Some of the produce is cultivated in their